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ABSTRACT

A growing trend in social science research is to reject those modes that treat individuals as objects of research and to accept the role of catalyst in helping the people to do their own research. Also, there is an increasing demand that results of social research must serve in a timely way to improve the situation of those involved. Participatory research meets these two requirements. Its basic premise is the democratic principle that oppressed and marginalized people can transform their social realities through education, research, and action. The facilitator does not choose the problem, the study method, or persons to carry out the study. The people set priorities and choose a problem, explore the roots of the problem, and research alternatives for correcting root conditions. The solution to one problem makes evident the next problem. Documentation is important but it need not be written. The cases of a group of indigenous women in India and a group of women in a city housing project in the District of Columbia, demonstrate participatory research's applicability in developing and industrialized countries. Adult education graduate students should learn this methodology because social science research is changing. Students need to be taught the following principles: people have to do it themselves; their values and not those of the students must prevail; people must choose their own methodology; people must choose their action priority; people must evaluate their own successes or failures; and what people learn will be the basis for further learning. (YLB)

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PREPARING GRADUATE STUDENTS TO CARRY OUT PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

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> ...an African idigenous NGO [Non-governental Organization] must be African conceived, African propelled and African directed at all levels and in totality, i.e. process, policy, management and execution. An indigenous NGO therefore builds on the indigenous people's capacities, capabilities, existing structures and organisations, technology, skills, leadership, enthusiasm, the spirit of solidarity, the hope for a new future and the determination to work for it. Consciously or otherwise indigenous NGOs arise on a basic premise: namely that the environment which gives rise to a problem also has the elements for its resolution.
>
> In this way then the indigenous NGOs differ from expatriate NGOs for whom the basis of wisdom and power is money; and since they have the money while the African peoples do not, they know what is good for the African peoples. For the expatriate NGOs "professional and technical expertise" is critical to development. And after proclaiming their expatriate staff to be the experts, a claim they vigorously back up with money, it follows that these experts must be at the centre of the commanding heights of development action. Above all, the expatriate NGOs must provide the ideological and philosophical leadership. (Wangoola, 1991)

These words from Paul Wangoola, the Secretary General of the African Association for Literacy and Adult Education merit very close attention. We are all aware that terms, such as, "less developed countries," "developing countries" and even "Third World Countries" are less than acceptable to the countries which we are trying to designate by these terms. Preferred now is the general location of such countries and the term is "the South," whether in the east or the west. Further, these countries feel that they have indeed suffered continuing oppression by the countries of the north whom they see as having ulterior motives in trying to develop them, and even when the intentions are the best, the north oppresses them by trying to determine how they may develop. Indigenous people do not see too much in the north that they wish to emulate, and above all they wish to be in charge of their own development.

With the ever increasing sophistication of indigenous people, whether in "the South" or marginal populations in industrialized countries, there is a growing trend in social science research to reject those modes that treat individuals as objects of research and instead accept the role of catalyst in helping the people to do their own research. Further, there is an increasing demand that the results of social science research serve in a timely way to improve the situation of those involved. The developing mode of participatory research meets these two requirements. However, participatory research is not a simple method; neither is it easily explained or carried out. Based, as it is, in the principle of optimal and imminent human development, it requires a value system and a kind of commitment not necessarily inherent in traditional social science research.

Participatory research is a combination of education, research and action so intertwined that the three components can not really be separated from each other or approached serially. The purpose is the empowerment of people by helping them to determine their own problems, educate themselves about these, decide how they wish to prioritize them, learn about their causes, find out where help is to be found, decide upon solutions and take action.

The term "Participatory Reasearch" is, in a way, a misnomer, because it does not fully describe the education and action phases of the total concept. The name developed in Tanzania in the mid 1970's, when researchers and researched decided that traditional social science research often did not help any given

group of people directly, if at all. At this time, the objection that traditional research patterns made objects out of people was felt so keenly that the name, "Paritıcpatory Research," was coined as a counter concept and has stuck like glue even though it is not completely descriptive.

It was inevitable that the academic community, in the early days, would have difficulty accepting participatory research as true research. To the traditionalist, research is carried out by an academic who begins with an hypothesis, who searches the literature for relevant material, sets up conditions which can be replicated, carries out the work, writes up the results and publishes the findings, but has little or no responsibility for follow-up action. While this is a most acceptable method for many kinds of research, this paper will show that none of these attributes apply to participatory research, and thus a certain amount of confusion, criticism and misunderstanding occurred, especially in the early years.

Rajesh Tandon, the Coordinator of the Participatory Research Network of the International Council for Adult Education, explains that now, two decades later, participatory research has proven itself as a useful and valid mode in its own right:

> Participatory Research has reached a stage of clearer articulation. (It) is no more presented as a critique of traditional social science research, it has a philosophy and a world view of its own. It is beginning to articulate questions of political economy of research: who's interest does research serve? It is transcending the petty debate on the issues of techniques and methods. The practice of Paritıcpatory Research has demonstrated that the tools and techniques are not central issues. The issue is control over the process of the production of knowledge, its storage and its use. (Tandon 1987)

Nevertheless, in so far as one of the components of participatory research is indeed research, it is necessary to understand its distinctiveness in relation to traditional research, especially traditional survey research to which it was a reaction. Dr. Budd Hall, Secretary General of the International Council for Adult Education, based in Toronto, who is one of the founders of the concept of participatory research, points out some of the shortcomings of traditional survey research. According to Hall, surveys oversimplify social reality by forcing choices; they reflect poorly the dynamics of a situation since they present one moment in time and experience in a changing world; and through testing the individual in isolation, he believes that survey research can be dominating, oppressive and alienating. Further, no direct action results. (Hall 1979)

The basic premise of participatory research is the democratic principle that oppressed and marginalized peoples, through education, research and action can transform their social realities. This kind of empowerment will be based on their own value systems. The research methods will be various and different to fit different situations. Knowledge will be created, which may or may not be published in books, but will enhance the quality of life in this world, however informally it is dispensed.

Participatory research can only be carried out in societies which allow some minimal amount of freedom. Participatory research will not solve all the world's problems,

but it is a logical extension of modern adult education principles of andragogy--that adults must be autonomous, self-directed learners, who engage in educational situations to solve the problems they pose themselves.

Methodology

From the foregoing description of participatory research, the reader will already have observed that, as opposed to traditional research, methodology for participatory research is comprehensive, various, creative and never twice the same. This does not mean, however, that there are not very definite philosophical guidelines for carrying out this type of research effort.

In the first place the role of the facilitator bears little resemblence to that of the traditional researcher, for the motivation is quite different. This person facilitates not only research but also education and action. In any event, the facilitator does not choose the problem to be studied, the method whereby it will be studied, the persons to carry out the study and can lay no claim to research findings.

While the role of the traditional researcher requires objectivity and neutrality, the role of the PR facilitor may never be value-free, but rather the facilitator must be committed to the very special development of the group he/she is serving. The facilitator may indeed write up and publish accounts of the experience, and hopefully would, for the rewards of this work for the people themselves are so significant that they should be reported.

The basic premise of participatory research is that oppressed and disadvantaged persons can empower themselves through examining their own situation; developing understanding of the political, economic and social determinants of that situation; researching alternative scenarios; taking action that grows out of their own culture and values; and thus adding to the knowledge base for the enhancement of the quality of life.

The very first step for the researcher is to spend sufficient time with the people concerned to develop a relationship of understanding and trust. Only then can an authentic discussion of the needs and aspirations of the people begin. The role of the facilitator will vary with the situation, depending on the level of awareness of their problems by the people themselves, and especially on the extent to which the peole have an initial belief that their own intervention can make a difference.

The process begins with the poeple, but the facilitator must relate to them and with them so closely that he/she can tune in on their needs, interests and values and serve as an animator to help the people choose a starting pont. It would be ridiculous to claim that the facilitator takes no part in expediting the process. The people need the knowledge and skills of the facilitor to help them change their situation, but the facilitator must resist the temptation to make decisions for them. The facilitator walks a fine line between animating and decision-making, but the difference is distinct.

The process starts with informal discussions with individuals and small groups, but over time, a more formal

structure must evolve so that the decisions that are made are truly representative of the people as a whole. The first decision will have to be the setting of proirities and the choice of the first problem for study and action. And at this point education and research meld with action. The roots of the problem must be explored and documented so that all the people have clear understanding of them. Documentation may take whatever form is natural to the group. In some instances, popular theater is a better vehicle than the written word. The next step involves research into the various alternatives for correcting or changing these root conditions. The researach must be comprehensive enough to assure that all sectors of the community have been heard, and through this process they have developed a common understanding to undergird the action which must follow.

It is obvious that the foregoing steps do not happen serially. Education, research and action are really taking place simultaeously while the people are asking the questions about the problem and the possible answers--how, when, where, why and who.

Once the process has started it should continue in some form with some of the people almost spontaneously. The solution to one problem makes evident the next problem. As the ripple effect continues a new perspective grows that shows the various problems in relationship to the structure of society.

The greatest virtues for the facilitator are patience and perserverence to help the people develop their own leadership

process. This is critically important because sooner or later at some level the process will turn political. Then it will be crucial that the politics of the situation represent the authentic politics of the people themselves and not some notion dreamed up by an outsider.

Knowledge gained through PR is immediately put to use, for as people understand the causes of a problem and plot remedies for that problem, they have educated themselves for action, but action is not only an end product. Small actions have been taking place throughout the whole process.

Documentation is important, but the emphasis on written ducumentation may not apply. Where knowledge has been gained, it should be shared, but people have been sharing knowledge through the oral tradition for centuries, and it is still an effective means, especially for illiterate peoples. Where peoples are used to sharing through pictures on blackboards or even newsprint, that, too, is effective sharing. The reports of the facilitator are also important aspects of the documentation.

Case Study

Space in this article does not allow for a full description of even one case study, but two types of cases will be briefly examined to show how PR is applicable in the south and in industrialized countries.

The first case is that of a group of indigenous women in India who, with the help of the facilitator, developed the skills of popular theater as their vehicle of communication. This group of women goes to a particular urban area and makes every effort to get to know the people there and to become known and trusted

by them. The next step is to create small theatrical productions about the various problems people have mentioned to them. Popular theater is an established community experience for these people, but it is customarily performed by men and for entertainment purposes. These women decided to use it for enhancing the quality of life. After each presentation, they held discussions with the members of the audience, asking them to critique the performance to see whether they are expressing a problem as it exists in reality. If sufficient suggestions are put forth for altering the show, they perform it again right away making the corrections, until the people are satisfied that it represents the total picture.

The next step is for the women to mix with the people in their daily lives again and listen to the various suggestions that individuals and small groups might have for improving a given situation. When the women have exhausted the ideas for remedy, they again make theater presentations depicting the various solutions possible. They act out each and again take suggestions from the audience as to how the scenario would be achieved. When all the possible alternatives have been portrayed and discussed, then it is time for the people to decide the actual steps they wish to take.

In this case the women of the community had decided that their first interest was gaining some equality with the men, in a situation where the women, in addition to the complete responsibility for the home and children, were also employed. The unquestioned power of tradition and religion kept them

oppressed. Not until they had this public discussion, could any change be imagined. However, the community agreed that boys should be trained to help their mothers, and not only should men take some responsibility for the home, but that the women should have a voice in community decisions. Thus, in opening up for discussion the formerly closed bonds of tradition, the women were transforming their own reality.

The second case took place in a city housing project in Washington, D.C., when the author and some graduate students wanted to ascertain why the women did not make use of all the educational opportunities available to them through city initiatives. In this particular instance, the women immediately proved their sophistication by refusing to be studied, but they did invite the group to come and meet with them regularly and work with them in various ways, and suggested that in the process the university group would gain some knowledge. The women made it clear that they would be the leaders, and they were.

Their particular method could be described as trial and error, but it was their best way of learning reality and preparing themselves to upgrade their situation. Having been recipients of many stipended government programs, which seemed to wash over them and leave them in no better situation, the women were very cynical and hopeless. They also needed to test out the university group to see whether they were deserving of any more trust than the government. At first they asked for help in locating jobs, but with their limited educational levels, the entry level jobs that a few secured were not worth the effort of

getting off welfare. Secondly, they wanted help with nutrition and weight control, but after some weeks at this effort, they decided they did not have the discipline to carry out programs, and they gave over this effort. Then they went to activities like furniture refinishing which was a fad at that time. They soon learned that materials for this cost quite a bit, and further they did not like working by themselves on a piece of furniture when the real life was going on out in the community. They gave this effort over, and asked for driver education. The university group tried in vain to get city help for this and finally found driver education instructors from the public schools to help on their own time. A number of the women succeeded in procuring their driver's licences and this was a huge accomplishment for them.

This process of trial and error was a very effective way of checking out their own interests and abilities and needs. When they succeeded at driver education, they saw themselves differently--as capable persons equal to all other drivers in the city. They had a new sense of self which told them more than any counselor ever could have done. They were ready to attack their basic probem which was lack of education. They asked the university group to help them work for their high school equivilancy examination. They did not want to go out to city educational programs, they wanted to do it right there with the people they had learned to trust, the university group. The story of how this all developed is too long to complete here except to say that fourteen of them did pass the examination, and

did get admitted to the city college. Some of them stayed through four years and some of the quit after a year or two when they were able to get good jobs that they liked. That was success to them and they are the ones who must define succeess for themselves.

One could ask if traditional researchers from outside either of these communities could have carried out studies which would have been nearly as meaningful either in the creation of knowledge or in the benefits to the women themselves. Dr. Budd Hall's criticisms of traditional survey research mentioned earlier in this paper would have been valid in these cases.

Why Prepare Graduate Students

The basic question is, of course, why graduate students should be prepared to carry out participatory research, especially since it is unlikely that PR would be acceptable as dissertation research in most places. Nevertheless, it has been done. I cite specifically the dissertation and later the book based on the dissertation of a woman named Patricia Maguire at the University of Massachusetts, Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach. (1987) I should also say that courses in the subject of participatory research are appearing on more campuses, little by little. Dr. Budd Hall gives one at York University in Canada. At the University of Massachusetts, Dr. Peter Park and Dr. David Kinsey offer such courses. At the University of Vermont, Dr. Corrine Glesne does also. The Ohio University has several courses which include participatory reseach. And I myself have done so as well. These are just a few cases of which I am personally familiar.

But why should the adult education graduate student learn this methodology? The very basic reason is that social science research is changing. Economically or educationally disadvantaged people no longer wish to be objects of anybody's research. They do not believe that it translates into action that enhances their lives. They resent the fact that traditional research has fed into the hegemony of northern industrialized and technological interests. They are in a mood to take charge of their own affairs. Nevertheless, they understand that they may need help, but a very special kind of help and only when they ask for it. Further, they will ask why anyone wants or needs to come to their country to do research projects when there are unserved persons in their own countries. Indigenous persons are becoming quite sophisticated. If too many are still undereducated, one would make a great mistake to overlook their desire to be "masters of their own destiny", to use the words of Father M.M.Coady of Canada.

The first instinct of students going out to work with disadvantaged persons, is to rush in, find their problems and solve them. It takes much previous training to help them realize that the people have to do it for themselves; that their values, not the students' must prevail; that people must choose their own methodology, and that progress may be slow; that action priority must be decided by the people themselves; and the people themselves must make the evaluation of their own successes or failures. Then what the people have learned, they will never forget and it will be the foundation for further learning. The

students must be faithful friends, catalysts, resource persons and always dependable.

Participatory research is then the people researching their own problems, looking at alternatives for solving them, choosing the priority actions and carrying them out. In this way research does enhance their lives and can bring social transformation.

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